

Creating the WOW factor

Lina Craven explains how to make your practice outshine the competition



Lina Craven is the founder and director of Dynamic Perceptions Ltd. Over the past twenty-five years, Lina Craven has assisted dental practices to realise their vision of success through the achievement of a customer-driven culture that focuses on delivering an exceptional patient journey. Lina's qualifications and experience as an orthodontic therapist, treatment coordinator (TC) and practice manager validate her position as advisor to those UK and European orthodontic practices wishing to achieve something special and she is very excited to be presenting her highly successful two-day workshop; 'The Treatment Coordinator and The New Patient Process', Oxford January 31st – February 1st 2008 and in Dublin on February 28th - 29th 2008. Visit www.orthodontic-management.com for further details.

Imagine the power of exceeding a customer's expectations! You hear the expression all the time; consultants use it constantly and business books are full of it. Funny then that it still remains a rare occurrence: it isn't difficult, it doesn't require huge expense, it probably generates the greatest return, yet it is the rarest commodity across all industry sectors. Stop looking for that elusive unique selling point (USP) and just do the basics well.

Does your first impression, impress?

The question you must ask yourself is how many of the patients who walk through your practice door actually take up treatment plans? While you may be successfully attracting patients to the practice, is your success reflected in high case acceptance ratios? It takes enormous effort, at great cost, to get prospective patients through the door so it is vital that the opportunity is not wasted!

First impressions count

The first contact is crucial to a successful conversion. Patients are generally unaware of the skills of the clinician or the reputation of the practice so they will tend to shop around. Their decision-making process isn't normally price oriented; it is simply based on their experience and whether their needs and wants have been taken into account when treatment options have been offered! They want to feel confident in making the right decision and that means your new-patient journey needs to be outstanding!

Even before the patient arrives

The first impression of your practice begins with the first inquiry so the initial phone call is all-important.

Whenever you call a prospective patient, do so from a 'distraction-free' place and always ask if it is OK to talk; if they say it is not a convenient time then arrange a mutually suitable alternative, otherwise carry on. Regardless if they have been referred or have self-referred, they must have your full attention because you only have this one chance to make an outstanding first impression.

Confirm personal details and the referral source. Explain what the initial consultation involves. Agree on an appointment time and advise them that they will receive a welcome pack in the post detailing practice information and the types of treatments available.

Be attentive and speak with a smile in your voice. I frequently undertake mystery shopping and come across practices that fail in one or more of these steps. Many practices don't even ask for my name, they simply deal with my call

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as a general inquiry and not as an opportunity! Some practices have even 'diagnosed' my treatment needs over the telephone! Scary!

Your welcome pack forms part of the initial first impression too. This is where your investment in good marketing expertise pays off. The pack should portray the values of your practice and answer all the potential questions a new patient has - a patient is much more likely to make a buying decision when they have been well informed prior and during the consultation.

So if we have spoken to the patient in a confident, considerate and professional manner, and if we fulfilled our first promise by sending a welcome pack promptly, and if our pack looks professional, appealing and answers all or most of the patient's questions, then we can rest assured that we have made an outstanding first impression and created a solid opportunity for another case acceptance. The task now remains to further cement the relationship through the remaining experiences of the patient along their journey with you.

Put yourself in the patients' shoes

Imagine how a prospective patient feels on the eve of their appointment for an unfamiliar procedure; as it's a journey into the unknown, probably somewhat anxious. Imagine then the impact of receiving a call from the practitioner: 'Hi Lina! This is Doctor X. You have an appointment with me tomorrow at 9am. I want to ensure I answer any concerns you may have at this time'. Nine times out of ten the patient is so surprised by this gesture that no concerns are expressed and any that may have existed

have been alleviated by the call! In about 1.5 minutes, at no cost, you will have wowed the patient and definitely reduced the likelihood of any costly last minute cancellations or no-shows. While some practitioners may be questioning the validity of this suggestion - after all, they have staff to undertake this function - they should consider the following: with an average of three new patients to call a day, at 1.5 minutes a call - an investment in time of no more than five minutes - the subsequent conversion of several thousand pounds of revenue and a raft of additional 'raving fans' who will go on to become the greatest advocates of your service is a return worthy of some consideration

Plan the stages of the journey implicitly

When the patient arrives for the appointment, be ready! The treatment coordinator (TC) should greet the patient with a firm handshake, make him/her feel welcome with some refreshments and follow the rapport questionnaire.

Consider the wow factor when the practitioner first approaches the patient and rather than the standard, 'What concerns you about your teeth?' he says, 'Hi Lina! Congratulations, I understand you are getting married in eight months. Let's see how we can give you a perfect smile for that day!'

Following the clinical examination, the manner of case presentation is crucial. It shouldn't be rushed. You want your patient to leave well informed and ready to make the right decision. A well-trained TC will enhance the practitioner's explanation using layman's terms; he or she will check understanding and qualify any remaining doubts without wasting valuable 'doctor' time and a comprehensive walkout pack will be provided with a planned follow-up process. With the right systems in place a full written report can be presented before the patient leaves, furnishing them with the information necessary to make the 'right' decision.

The power of talented people and proficient processes

So for no additional cost but some extra thought, care and attention with regard to the team you choose, the skills you give them and the processes you employ, you will have 'wowed' a customer, vastly increased your case acceptance, and benefited from the enormous power of a 'raving fan' culture! Now that to me is the most powerful USP any business can have!

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